DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 275 656 SP 028 241

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TITLE Induction the Natural Way: Informal Mentoring.
PUB DATE Nov 86
NOTE 27p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Council of States on Inservice Education (11th, Nashville, TN, November 21-25, 1986).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Beginning Teachers; Elementary Secondary Education; *Helping Relationship; *Interprofessional Relationship; *Master Teachers; *Mentors; Staff Development; Teacher Orientation

ABSTRACT

Observations were made of 15 protege teachers and 6 of their mentors to determine characteristics of naturally occurring mentoring relationships experienced by teachers, how mentoring relationships were formed in public education, and benefits accruing to the protege and to the mentor in such relationships. Study results indicated that the availability of the mentor was an important factor in the success of the relationship and that approachability and receptivity were important aspects of the mentoring relationships. An experience differential between mentor and protege was a necessary component of mentoring for classroom teachers. Mentors played many roles in the professional life of their proteges. Clear and on-going two-way communication was a hallmark of mentoring relationships, and learning was one of the primary reasons for the formation of mentoring relationships. Mentors appeared to honor the autonomy of their proteges and mentoring was seen as an empowering relationship. Results indicated that mentoring appeared to have great promise as a means of initiating new members into the teaching profession. (CB)

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# INDUCTION THE NATURAL WAY: INFORMAL MENTORING

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A paper presented at the
Eleventh Annual National Conference of the
National Council of States on Inservice Education
November 21-25, 1986
Nashville, Tennessee

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Induction the Natural Way: Informal Mentoring

During the past fifteen years, mentoring has become a much-discussed topic in many fields of endeavor. Business and industry, higher education, and human services have all become intensely interested in the potential inherent in mentoring for improving both job productivity and satisfaction. More recently, the possible benefits of mentoring for personal and program development have begun to be investigated in the context of public education and the classroom teacher.

An evergrowing number of states and cities have passed legislation which would require that school districts provide beginning and probationary teachers with mentors. In these programs new teachers would be assigned to a "master teacher" who would presumably act as a source of support, advice, and inspiration for the intern.

It is laudable that local and state legislative bodies are interested in the plight of the beginning teacher. There is ample evidence (e.g., Grant & Zeichner, 1981; Ryan, Newman, Mager, Applegate, Lasley, Flora, and Johnston,1980; Hoy, 1968) that the beginning teacher faces many hurdles in attempting to successfully negotiate that first (even second and third) year of teaching. Lortie (1975) says that teaching seems to be the only profession where "the beginner becomes fully responsible from the

first working day and performs the same tasks as a twenty-five year veteran" (p.72). All of this responsibility and occupational pressure takes place just at the time when the new teacher is at that stage of development when he or she has many life changes to negotiate. Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, McKee (1978) point out that at this time "A young man must shift the center of gravity of his life; no longer a child in his family of origin, he must become a novice adult with a home base of his own" (p.57).

The profession places another burden on the new teacher by being structured in such a way as to make communication between teachers on matters of practice and procedure very difficult. Teachers have been characterized by many as "psychologically isolated" from the general community. Howsam, Corrigan, Denemark and Nash (1976) state, "Many new teachers function in a professional desert, abandoned by the institutions where they received their preservice education and neglected by overburdened school supervisory personnel" (p. 101). Hall (1982) suggests that, "Teaching is one of very few professions in which the novice is expected to assume full responsibility from the first day on the job" (p. 53). Young teachers are not prepared for the loneliness of the classroom. They feel a need for professional relationships in which problems can be discussed and questions asked without fear of being perceived as incompetent.

In writing about these first years of a teacher's professional life, Bush (1966) says, "Here he learns his role, internalizes the basic values of the teacher's culture, forms his conceptions and standards that will strongly influence his behavior for years to come" (p. 7). Could a mentor be an important factor in this process, easing the transition from student to teacher and from novice to professional? If so, mentoring has the potential for being an important force in upgrading the effectiveness of America's teachers. There is just beginning to be an indication from research as to the extent to which informal mentoring already exists in public education Though this feeling of isolation is undoubtedly real, some research (Egan,1985; Fagan & Walter, 1982; Gehrke & Kay, 1984; Miller, Taylor, & Walker, 1982) has shown that both beginning and experienced teachers report that the most useful and constant source of support is from fellow teachers. If the education profession is going to institute mentoring as an intervention in the professional development of both inexperienced and experienced teachers, the profession must become better informed about this phenomenon.

The following observations are mainly the result of a study conducted with 15 protege teachers, and the mentors of six of these same people. Three questions guided the gathering of information and its analysis. Those questions are: A) What are the characteristics of naturally occurring mentoring relationships experienced by

teachers? B) How are mentoring relationships formed in public education? C) In a mentoring relationship, what benefits accrue to the protege? to the mentor?

The availability of the mentor is an important factor in the success of the relationship. One characteristic of a successful mentoring relationship that is voiced again and again by proteges is the availability of the mentor. My mentor was "always there when needed, and I could always talk with him about anything," "a constant resource, there all of the time," "he was somebody there to constantly ask questions of and get advice from." She was "always there to give encouragmen and praise." In contrast to the "loneliness of teaching" expressed by many teachers, these mentors somehow seemed to have been able to make themselves available when their proteges needed them most. They were there to give advice, to give a hint on how to handle a teaching problem, to boost sagging spirits, or to share in some minor triumph. A key element in mentoring relationships is that the mentors must be easily available to their proteges. This availability is contrasted with the amount of time both people must invest in the relationship, and the well-known, finite amount of time available to school people.

One factor which can interfere with the availability of the mentor is lack of time. Mentoring takes "time--an awful lot of time. Meeting with people after school and spending time in their classrooms and having them spend

time in your classroom takes a lot of time" (Egan, 1985,p.198). Mentor and protege alike speak of schedules that do not permit people to get together. The often heard sentiment that teaching is an extremely lonely profession, especially at the elementary level where common planning times are seldom available, becomes real barrier to mentoring relationships. Finding the "time of day to be able to sit down and talk with each other, or just to be able to explain something...time of day to do anything" (p.199) was very difficult.

Approachability and receptivity are important aspects of the mentoring relationships.. Mentors must be seen by their proteges as people who could be approached when there were questions to be answered or problems to be shared. On the other hand, proteges need to demonstrate that they are receptive to the ideas and help that was offered by their mentors.

Mentors voice the receptivity concept in this way: "I talk a lot and when someone responds as Micky did..., I wouldn't hesitate to make suggestions if I observed stuff or heard stuff or saw stuff" (Egan,p.199); "When somebody like Harry wants to know them (skills), it makes it all the more fun" (p.199).

From the standpoint of proteges some send signals that they want to "fit in very well" and "go along with the system." Other proteges may feel comfortable and have enough confidence in their mentors to ask them to observe and critique their beginning efforts in the

classroom. Many proteges describe themselves as perhaps being "more susceptible, more on the same wave length" with their mentors than with other teachers at their grade level or in their departments. This "buying into" the philosophy being promoted by the mentor helped create a climate in which a mentoring relationship flourished. Sometimes the value of the assistance being offered is not understand at first.

Cathy's description of her experience sums up the concept of receptivity. A friendly relationship had been established between Cathy and Mary, but a new dimension was added to that relationship when Cathy realized "how much [she] didn't know" about teaching. It was at that point that Cathy became much more receptive to the ideas and advice being offered to her by Mary.

An experience differential between mentor and protege is a necessary component of mentoring for classroom teachers. Most research emphasises an age differential of 8-20 years between mentor and protege as being typical. However, some recent research on mentoring among classroom teachers (Egan, 1985) strongly suggests that experience is a more important factor than age. Proteges who are chronologically more mature than the typical beginning teacher often find mentors of their own age, or possibly mentors who are considerably younger than themselves. A person may be mature and have had wide ranging experiences; however, when confronted with the new and complex task of teaching some of these people seek a

mentor. This phenomenon also becomes evident when an experienced teacher changes positions within the education establishment. Although experienced as teachers these people are beginners in counseling or math or first grade, and apparently have many of the same needs as any other novice. Although chronologically and developmentally mature, these teacher-proteges are novices at these new skills. They are able to establish relationships with experienced people who are willing to help them learn their new craft. This age similarity would appear to free these relationships from the adult development tasks typically associated with the protege role.

There is also some evidence to suggest that teachers need different types of mentoring at different points in their careers. As neophytes in teaching people need basic, straightforward, "how-to do-it" information. They are trying to survive from day to day. However, as teachers mature they are more able to attend to some of the more complex tasks and issues in teaching and education. At this point in their careers, teachers are ready to relate to a mentor on a higher conceptual level than they could as beginners. Given the opportunity and guidance, the more mature teacher is now able to analyze classroom problems from a variety of perspectives rather than seeking the "quick fix." They have much less need for technical assistance than before, and are ready to address such various issues as mainstreaming and alternative means of delivering instruction.

Mentors play many roles in the professional life of their proteges. Some experienced educators exhibit a great willingness and talent in sharing their expertise with the people who name them as mentors. Three of these mentor roles--model, teacher, and counselor--seemed to have a great impact on the professional growth of their proteges.

One of the most powerful mentor roles is that of model. This modeling takes several forms. The opportunity to observe their mentor in the act of teaching has a powerful effect on teacher-proteges. The proteges seem to view this as theory into practice, and they speak glowingly about how valuable this type of experience is to them. Some proteges are encouraged by these observations, and as a result request that their mentors assist them by observing and critiquing their own teaching. One person credits this process with helping him to become a more effective teacher, and he feels that being more effective made him like the teaching profession more than he might have otherwise (Egan, 1985).

Another facet to the modeling role is that of proteges observing the manner in which their mentors interact with students. Proteges recall that their mentors always seemed to look at the good points of their students, and that they tried to improve the self-concept of those students who tended to have problems with school. The proteges remembered that their mentors treated students as individuals, and appreciated students as being

of greater importance than any content material.

The third aspect of the mentor-as-model concerns the area of professional behavior. Ways of communicating with parents and other faculty members, appropriate dress, and questions of professional ethics are some of the concerns that proteges learn to deal with by associating with and observing their mentors.

A second important mentor role is that of teacher. Mentors teach their proteges how to develop and use teaching materials. They instruct the beginners in the practical aspects of child development and how that is manifested in teacher expectations and planning. Organizing materials and planning for instruction are among the first areas in which the experienced mentors are able to help their proteges.

Clear and ongoing two-way communication is a hallmark of mentoring relationships. Three means of transmitting information and skills seem to be at work in mentoring relationships. The means are: a great deal of questioning and talking together; a significant amount of time spent modeling behaviors; and planning and working in a type of team teaching. Talking together appears to be a constant in teacher mentoring relationships. Mentors and proteges talk a great deal with one another, often well after everyone else has left the school building. Both partners must feel free to initiate a conversation, but the lead in this aspect of the relationship comes from the questions of the protege. These conversations cover

great philosophical issues in education as well as minute details, such as where to get some staples. Most of the conversations involve the practical aspects of daily teaching.

The second means of information transmission is through modeling. This modeling takes several different forms. This first form, opportunities for the protege to observe the mentor as he or she teaches, has been described earlier. The reciprocal situation in which the mentor observes and critiques the teaching performance of his or her protege almost inevitably follows, as the relationship grows in trust and confidence. One protege expressed this sentiment in this way: "You don't feel threatened and afraid to show your weaknesses [when you have confidence and trust]"(Egan, 1985,p.208).

A second type of modeling described by the protege-subjects was the role model provided by their mentors. In this type of modeling, the professional and personal behaviors of the mentors became a guide and a standard for the behavior of their proteges. Role modeling often occurs without the knowledge of the person being modeled. Proteges describe the behavior of their mentors as inspiring. They see models of appropriate professional dress and behavior in their mentors. In some cases the proteges try to emulate the model of a teaching professional provided by their mentor.

The third means of transmitting skills and knowledge is through the mentor and protege planning and working

in a semi-team teaching manner. Through the process of coordinating their efforts so as to utilize materials and time more efficiently, mentors can create a type of clinical laboratory. The give and take which takes place naturally under these conditions provides a forum in which the beginning teacher can gain an insight into some of the ongoing problems confronting teachers. As one mentor put it, "In the course of discussing that [9th grade science teacher planning], you get an awful lot of information for a new person, or for somebody looking for new ideas" (Egan,1985,p.210).

Learning is one of the primary reasons for the formation of mentoring relationships. A person who is beginning or changing careers is faced with a set of tasks to be accomplished. These tasks require a type of knowledge or skill that the individual has not yet attained. In order to solve the problems of the new position and gain the knowledge and skill required, the beginner seeks help from an experienced person.

The foregoing is a condensed version of a complex process which could lead to a mentoring relationship. It also highlights some of the aspects of the theory of adult learning known as andragogy. Knowles (1973) stated four assumptions about the characteristics of adult learning which delineates it from child learning, pedagogy. These assumptions are: adults are increasingly self-directed in their learning as they mature; the adult has accumulated experiences which cause him to be a rich resource for

learning; an adult's readiness to learn is increasingly the product of the developmental tasks required for the performance of his evolving social roles; adults have a problem solving orientation to learning. The adult is "experiencing some inadequacy with current life problems. He wants to apply tomorrow what he learns today" (Knowles, 1973, p.48).

The course of the mentoring that takes place in naturally occurring relationships strongly supports these assumptions of adult learning. With very few exceptions, protege-subjects are problem centered in their learning strategies. In the early stages of their relationships, many proteges are looking for help with the "day to day sort of thing." On a broader basis, they are faced with certain developmental tasks, some of which are general in nature and some of which are peculiar to the profession of teaching. As their mentoring relationships evolved, they accumulated experiences upon which to build new learning. They have opportunities to observe the teaching of their mentors and to have their own teaching observed and critiqued. Through the many discussions held between mentors and proteges, a structure is built in which new experiences can be categorized. The proteges mature at different rates, becoming less dependent upon their mentors for knowledge and support. Some of them eventually became resources for their former mentors.

Tough (1982) has said, "...most persons have a remarkably rich and successful natural process for

choosing, planning, and implementing their [life] changes. They largely handle these tasks on their own, with some help from friends and family" (p.106). One of the greatest change efforts he found people undertaking was "to become more competent at certain job responsibilities" (p.27). Teacher-proteges certainly fall into the category of people trying to become more competent. They also show a great deal of skill in establishing relationships in which they direct the course of the learning to fit their needs. One protege describes a mentor as "someone who is there if the person [protege] wants them. Someone that is not there telling you how to do things...kind of you [the protege] receive if you want the receiving" (Egan,1985,p.213). One thing that Tough (1982) cautions against is "overcontrol" on the part of the professional directing the learning experience of adults. Professional overcontrol does not appear to be an issue in naturally occurring mentoring relationships, since the proteges (sometimes after explicit encouragement by the mentors) are directing their own learning.

Mentors honor the autonomy of their proteges.

Proteges must feel that they have the freedom to accept or decline the ideas offered or suggestions made by their mentors. They are in charge of their own learning needs. Initially, the participants are free to decide whether or not they would establish a close working relationship. At this point, the personality factors which are at work in the beginning of any relationship were important in

deciding the future course of the relationship. Similar interests, a common sense of humor, and the status of family formation are some of the factors often mentioned. In some cases, teaching concerns initiate the relationship; in others, personal matters first bring people together. As previously described, the mentor must be seen as approachable and the protege as receptive. These relationships work. They produce desirable effects. The proteges learn and grow professionally and became effective educators. Their professional initiation appears to be smoother and less frustrating than that of their peers who lack mentors. Indeed, some proteges wonder aloud as to whether or not they would have stayed in the profession without the help and support of their mentors.

While the mentors are willing to give of their time and expertise, the proteges are interested in learning what the mentor has to offer. But it is also evident that the advice on techniques or information is not to be accepted uncritically. One of the sentiments most often expressed by proteges (Egan, 1985) is that they "felt free to pick and choose" those techniques, those bits of wisdom, or that advice which best suited their own developing teaching philosophy and style. They feel that they were allowed to create their own style of teaching. One protege describes his mentor as "...never lording or imposing; she always gave me the feeling that if I didn't want to do it that way, I was free to do it some other

way" (Egan,1985,p.215). Some proteges express the delicate balance between accepting everything offered by their mentor and the risk of turning their mentor away by rejecting the help being offered. Neverless, they feel that they always had the option of doing things their own way, but at the same time making it clear that they wanted to "fit in" to the ways already established in the department or at the grade level.

Mentoring is an empowering relationship. Mentoring is an enabling process through which proteges become effective educators. Mentoring relationships begin with the mentor giving and the protege receiving, whether it is knowledge, advice, skills or support. Through the mentoring process, the proteges move from a dependent to an independent status in relation to their mentors.

Levinson et al. (1978) describes this empowerment as a point at which the protege no longer sees him or herself as a novice, but the protege "gains a fuller sense of his own authority and his capability for autonomous, responsible action" (p.99). Proteges variously describe the change in status as "not needing a big brother anymore," but being "more of a colleague after awhile." They feel that they go from being "takers" to colleagues who can offer ideas and skills to the common effort.

Reaching the point of being able to offer knowledge and skills to a person who is your mentor appears to be a powerful experience that is remembered vividly. Many

proteges even recall specific incidents which give them great feelings of satisfaction that they were finally able to contribute something of value to the relationship. The feeling of being a capable professional was expressed in this way by one protege. By having a mentor, he was helped to become a better teacher, and by becoming a better teacher he felt better about the profession. "...it made me like the profession a lot better because when you become more effective you just like what you're doing better" (Egan,1985,p.217).

The process of empowerment for the protege has similar benefits for the mentor. The mentors themselves become empowered through the association with a new colleague with whom they have already established a solid working relationship. The mentors also improve their own skills and sharpen their own perspectives through the process of helping a beginning professional become an effective educator. Through the process of making ideas and methods explicit to another person, mentors refine their own long-used ideas. By helping a beginner, some mentors report that they "clarify things" in their own mind, because they have to look closely at what they are doing. As a result of this interaction, a school district gets not one, but two more effective teachers.

Implications

This study, although small in scope, suggests some implications for research and practice which go beyond the experience of the subjects chronicled here. Classroom teachers, staff development specialists, educational researchers, teacher educators, state and local policy-making bodies, district and building administrators, and teachers' associations can consider this data in the task of understanding and addressing problems that fall within their professional area of concern.

Teachers, both beginning and experienced, may be encouraged by these descriptions and findings to be less afraid to ask for assistance with a teaching problem. Experienced classroom teachers and educational specialists may be inspired to make themselves more available and approachable. Sheive (1984) found that one of the greatest barriers to adult learning in schools is the "perceived unapproachability of experts" (p.17).

Staff development specialists may get a clearer picture from this study of what teachers feel a need to know, and how to structure a delivery system that corresponds with needs and learning styles of these adults.

Teacher educators could use the findings from this study to better select and train the cooperating teachers who will work with student teachers. The concepts of modeling, approachability, adult learning and empowerment should be particularly useful for this purpose.

State and local policy-making bodies could use this data to be better informed in their decisions that impact on the induction of beginning teachers. It should also be useful for them to know that these types of relationships already exist. Perhaps instead of massive new programs, what may be needed is a nurturing of a condition that already exists. The descriptions generated through this study provide information which can guide the design of programs aimed at providing support for probationary teachers. Five themes should be of special interest. First, it is clear that the course of the learning that took place was controlled by the protege. The proteges sought the help and information that they needed, as they needed it. The learning was oriented toward the solving of immediate problems. The second theme is strongly linked to that immediacy. The mentor must be readily available to the protege, so that questions may be asked while still fresh.

The third theme is closely allied to availability. Clear and ongoing communication is important for the efficacy of a mentoring relationship. The mentor transmits skills and knowledge by modeling teaching behaviors, and by planning side-by-side with his or her

protege. Once again, these aspects of a mentoring relationship require that a mentor be very available to the protege, and that both mentor and protege have the requisite time to talk, plan, and work together.

People who take on the role of mentor must be prepared to be role model, teacher, and counselor for their proteges. These mentors should understand that they are not trying to create a clone of themselves. Mentors must honor the autonomy of their proteges, and allow them to develop according to their individual philosophies. The relationship between mentor and protege needs to be cooperative, and not dominated by the more experienced person. The course of the relationship is guided by the needs of the protege, rather than by a predetermined external syllabus of teaching skills and knowledge.

District and building administrators who are looking for ways to enhance the "learning richness" (Sheive, 1984) of their schools should find the data from this study very informative. Their task would seem to be one of establishing a structure and a school climate which would enhance the opportunities for personal and professional growth on the part of their teachers. The twin problems of time and availability need to be addressed. One way to do that is through the process of scheduling classes. Can everyone at a grade level or department be given a planning period at the same time? Can the resource person, reading specialist or psychologist also be available at that same time at least once a week?

A second method of making people more available for consultation is through decreased teaching loads. It is at this point that teachers' associations could be helpful in working with the local officials on the design, responsibility for, and financial aspects of a system that would promote professional colleagiality. There is some evidence to show that through mentoring, a school district is getting not one, but two teachers who are functioning on a more effective level. Sheive (1984) found that some teachers "noted that being asked to teach colleagues caused them to confront the material in a different way" (p.12). The present study reinforces that idea. One mentor spoke of "clarifying things in [her] own mind" as she tried to explain a method or the use of some materials to her protege. The changes necessary to move most school districts toward an environment that promotes the learning of the adults in the organization are not inconsequential. In most school districts, it will take a concerted effort to change the organizational structure and philosophy of the system into ones that promote the learning of all members of the school community.

There are several areas in which further research is warranted. What are the long term effects of mentoring on the participants? Three of the proteges in this study alluded to "things [they] still do today" or "the impact wasn't felt until long after." How durable are the effects of the mentoring experience?

Some of the relationships examined in this study were formed under conditions of pressure. Mary and Norma were teaching in an "unreconstructed house" and they "didn't have any feeling of group" with the rest of the faculty. Nancy and Gail felt somewhat embattled by an administration and faculty that did not understand mainstreaming and special education. Gary found himself functioning as a mini-principal, and his background was of no help in meeting his needs. The other relationships do not seem to have that element of pressure in them, but some of the proteges involved may have felt embattled too. Are these relationships "mentoring," or is it another phenomenon? Are the relationships born out of pressure different from those formed under more benign circumstances?

Is there a danger of manipulation of the protege by the mentor? Mary certainly manipulated Cathy to some extent, although Cathy still felt free to do things her own way at any time.

Why didn't the other teachers in this school district experience a mentoring relationship? Only a small percentage of the total faculty reported such a relationship. What was different about the people and the circumstances which led some teachers to become mentors or proteges?

What is the impact of the school environment on the natural formation of mentoring relationships? How can mentoring relationships be encouraged? Can mentoring

relationships be successfully formalized, or would formalization create an entirely different relationship? The subjects of this study found more compatability with each other than with other members of their grade or department level. As a result, they formed the relationships described here. How similar in viewpoint must two people be in order to form a mentoring relationship?

What are the benefits and rewards for the mentors? In this study, there is only the hint that the personal satisfaction in "passing on a skill" or "getting the job done" sustains some mentors. Others felt that they gained a "life-long friend" and that was reward enough. Are there other rewards intrinsic to the role of mentor? Can these rewards be institutionalized in a formal mentoring program? How can experienced teachers be encouraged to offer their support and expertise to beginning teachers?

A basic question remains to be answered. Do we have true mentoring for classroom teachers, or is the phenomenon some other form of helping relationship? Indeed, is it possible to have a mentoring relationship in a profession that is not hierarchical.

The Teacher Mentoring Survey (Appendix A) opens with a description of the classic mentoring relationship. This relationship is all-encompassing, of great duration, and extremely intense. When compared with that classic mentoring relationship model, few of the relationships in this study could be called mentoring. The majority of the

relationships studied were not multi-dimensional, including all facets of the protege's life. The intensity level, the personal involvement with the success or failure of a career, was present in very few of the relationships.

However, these relationships were very successful. They are examples of wonderful working relationships between experienced professionals and beginners in the field of education. Help, support, knowledge, and skills were given and received. Through the presence of knowledgeable and giving experienced teachers, part of the stress, anxiety, and self-doubt of a few novice professionals was alleviated.

These helping relationships may not have been true mentoring in a classic sense, but there is little doubt that these relationships provided a structure in which the novice teachers were able to thrive. Perhaps the next step that needs to be taken is the categorization and labeling of various types of helping relationships, reserving the label of "mentoring" for those rare, classic relationships.

Additional research is required to test the findings of this study. Replications on a larger scale, and with subjects working in rural and inner city settings, would allow for the possibility of greater generalizability of the findings. It would also be useful to conduct a study on mentor-protege relationships closer to the time of their occurance. Due to the 10 to 20 year retrospective

of this present study, some of the subjects had difficulty in recalling some details of their relationship.

Mentoring is a process that appears to have great promise as a means of initiating new members into the teaching profession. Mentoring can be an important and useful way of providing the support and knowledge so badly needed by beginning teachers. Also, in view of the long term effects of mentoring, selecting the best mentors becomes a vital consideration. The relationships examined in this study were natural and unforced, even though great amounts of time and energy were invested by each participant. These relationships developed without official sanction or knowledge, but were efficacious and self-sustaining. The potential value of mentoring in education is great, but many questions such as those posed earlier in this chapter must be answered before policies of adoption or rejection of the process are enacted.

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